

# Australian Academy of Science

## Response to ARC consultation paper:

### ARC Centres of Excellence for funding commencing in 2011

<b>Respondent details</b>	
Your name (optional)	Professor Bob Williamson AO FRS FAA FRCP FRCPATH
Your position and organisation (optional)	Secretary, Science Policy, Australian Academy of Science
Contact details (optional)	Email: r.williamson@unimelb.edu.au
Please tick or highlight any category that describes your current status	<input type="checkbox"/> Researcher / employee – past or current ARC Centre <input type="checkbox"/> Partner organisation – past or current ARC Centre <input type="checkbox"/> Researcher – university-based <input type="checkbox"/> Researcher – other publicly funded agency <input type="checkbox"/> Researcher - other <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy vice-chancellor / pro vice-chancellor <input type="checkbox"/> University research office staff <input type="checkbox"/> ARC grant recipient <input type="checkbox"/> ARC partner organisation <input type="checkbox"/> ARC College of Experts member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Peak body with interest in research</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Business group <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) .....
Please tick or highlight the category that best describes your field(s) of research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Biological sciences and biotechnology</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <del>Engineering and environmental sciences</del> <input type="checkbox"/> Humanities and creative arts <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Mathematics, information and communication sciences</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Physics, chemistry and geoscience</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Social, behavioural and economic sciences
Would you be willing to discuss your comments in confidence with an ARC staff member?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Comment

<b>Objectives</b>	
Do you agree with the objectives of the <i>ARC Centres of Excellence</i> scheme?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Strongly agree</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree with some <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
	<p>Comment</p> <p>We believe that the Centres of Excellence program is of particular value because, amongst the ARC funding streams, it is one of the few that allows for generous funding for innovative and original research.</p>

<b>Targeting ARC Centres of Excellence</b>	
Do you agree that new rounds of the <i>ARC Centres of Excellence</i> scheme should be open to proposals from all fields of research (except clinical medicine and dental research)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Strongly agree</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy considers that well coordinated multidisciplinary research is to be encouraged</p>

<b>Innovative research with a higher degree of risk exposure</b>	
Do you agree new rounds of the <i>ARC Centres of Excellence</i> scheme should include research programs that carry a higher than normal element of risk, with the proviso that funding could be modified or terminated following a rigorous review process before reaching the maximum funding duration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Strongly agree</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy strongly agrees that programs involving a higher than normal element of risk should be supported and regards the proviso of redirection of funds as providing flexibility while retaining accountability.</p>

<b>Minimum and maximum funding per Centre per annum</b>	
Do you agree that the minimum annual funding for a Centre should be \$1 million?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Strongly agree</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Do you agree that the maximum annual funding for a Centre should be raised from \$3 million to \$4 million?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Strongly agree</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy regards the proposed \$1m p.a. to be a minimum level of Centre funding required to provide critical mass and supports an increase in maximum annual funding for Centres to at least \$4m p.a.</p>

<b>Duration of Centres</b>	
What do you believe to be the optimal duration of a Centre (assuming that application in subsequent rounds is also possible)?	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 years (present duration) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>7 years</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Should depend on the research program proposed <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) <p>.....</p>
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy believes that Centres of Excellence should propose programs that justify 7 years of funding but that final years should be subject to and guided by formal review processes. This could be especially relevant where higher risk research delivers discovery which may have significant bearing upon original research plans and objectives.</p>

<b>Selection criteria</b>	
<p>Do you agree with the proposed selection criteria for Centres?</p> <p>Do you agree with the proposed weighting of the selection criteria?</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Strongly agree</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree with some</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Mostly agree</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree with some</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mostly disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree</p>
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy agrees with the proposed selection criteria noting that they vary little from the existing criteria.</p> <p>The Academy notes a growing need to foster early career researchers and the importance of knowledge transfer and collaboration. The proposed weighting of the selection criteria could be improved by giving additional weight to <i>Criteria D. Research Training and Professional Development</i> and <i>Criteria E. Partner Support, End-User Engagement and Knowledge Transfer</i>.</p> <p>It would also appear that <i>Criteria C. Governance and Leadership</i> and <i>F. National Benefit and Linkages</i> broadly overlap with other Criteria and could stand to be given less weight.</p>
<b>Reporting and reviews</b>	
<p>Do you agree with the proposed in-principle arrangements for Centre reporting and reviews?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>In part</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy party supports the in-principle arrangements for Centre reporting and reviews.</p> <p>As the 3 paragraphs provided in the consultation paper are limited in scope and detail, it should be noted that reporting and review obligations can be resource intensive and should be structured to provide value to both the Centres and the ARC.</p> <p>The Academy believes further consultation is warranted to develop appropriate reporting and review</p>

	arrangements in light of the differing circumstances of Centres, their research and progress, and with respect to potentially changed duration of Centres.
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<b>Title retention</b>	
Do you agree with the proposed time limit for title retention?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy supports a 1 to 2 year retention of the title following conclusion of ARC funding in order to properly transition any funding, Intellectual Property and publishing obligations.</p>

<b>Other comments</b>	
Do you have any other comments on the proposed operation of the <i>ARC Centres of Excellence</i> scheme?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No
	<p>Comment</p> <p>The Academy supports the existence of multiple mechanisms to fund research of high quality in Australia. We believe that the Centres of Excellence program is of particular value because, amongst the ARC funding streams, it is one of the few that allows for generous funding for innovative and original research. By its nature it focuses on Australian scientific research programs of the highest quality.</p> <p>It is important that this stream of funding retains both its focus on originality, and that funding is sufficient to achieve and maintain international competitiveness. To meet the needs of individual Centres of Excellence, we support flexibility in the duration of time that a Centres of Excellence can be funded, and the raising of the financial limit to \$4M per annum.</p> <p>A Centre of Excellence as a national foci for research in a particular fields will often be inter-disciplinary and cross-funded by other agencies. The rules for funding the Centres of Excellence should allow various funding streams, some of which may be unconventional and cut across usual Government barriers. For instance, appropriate Centres of Excellence should be encouraged to obtain State Government funding as well as ARC funding. There</p>

	<p>may be times when funding across the ARC/NHMRC barrier will be appropriate, or funding with Commonwealth Research Agencies or with industry.</p> <p>It should be a stated and transparent policy that ARC will encourage with flexibility any initiatives that will make a Centre of Excellence a stronger entity, working in the national interest. We appreciate that the ARC already calls upon Fellows of our Academy, and of ATSE, for help in assessing proposals for Centres of Excellence. We reiterate our willingness to participate, as the peak body for science research in Australia, in formal and informal ways to assist with future selection and assessment of Centres of Excellence.</p>
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